

Transcript

Deblekha

Okay. I think we're rolling. Maybe we should just start with introducing who we are.

Sarah

Sure. So I'm Sarah. I am a librarian and technologist. I got into working with technology through my work in libraries and I live here on Galiano Island and work remotely for libraries all over North America.

Deblekha

And my name is Deblekha Guin. I also live here on these lands known as Galiano –the unceded territory of the Penelakut people, and many other Hul'quim speaking Nations with rights and responsibilities in this area. Also the overlapping, ceded territory of the Tsawwassen First Nation. In the context of this, I am the lay person who knows nothing about metadata, who is going to ask questions that wouldn't even dawn on you. I moved here to this place, known as Galliano, about 26 years ago, trying to take a semester off of school, and then never left

Sarah

That is how it happens.

Deblekha

It is. That's the thing about Galiano. And then, you know, finding that oddly my life made sense in retrospect. That the degree I got in Communications ended up being relevant to the life that sort of spontaneously unfolded for me here, which was being involved in starting the film school and then founding the organization called the Access to Media Education Society that works with multiple marginalized youth to tell stories through videos. So that's the Galliano magic

Sarah

We do have it here. Yes.

Sarah

I'm going to tell a brief Galiano anecdote that kind of closes that loop for me. So I grew up here. When I was in elementary school, we used to have an end of the year picnic. And a lot of the kids would get prizes. And I kept a few of my prizes- And I didn't realize until much later that they had given me library books, like they had library stamps on them and they still had the barcodes on the spines. So I had these library books from the Galiano Library and years later, moved away. I went to school, I traveled, and became a librarian, moved back here many, many years later. And just this week I joined the board of our library, which we didn't have when I was growing up. So now I'm on the board of our public library.

Deblekha

That's awesome. I love it. and hopefully one day, 15 years from now, I'll be able to tell the full circle of when the days I knew nothing about data

Sarah

It won't take that many years.

Deblekha

okay. Well, let's just dive in with the basics cause that's really where I'm at. So what is this thing that we're hearing about all the time called metadata?

Sarah

So it's a word that is out there that is scary for some people and it's completely unknown for others. If you read the dictionary, it'll say 'data about data' and that's not very helpful, but what it means is the facts that describe something. So I first learned about this in a library context. So a library record or a catalog record is all the information about a book. So the title, the author, how many pages, the size, and you see that when you look up a book in the library. You'll see all these pieces of information about it. But it turns out that that's actually how we organize information all over the place. So in the context of the internet, metadata is kind of what hooks everything together. So in an online shopping setting, you'll have a shirt that you're looking at buying and you'll see the size and the color. You might see what the logo is on it. You might see if it's for kids or for adults, those facts about the thing are all the metadata. And when you search, that's what you're searching for.

So a photograph on your phone or your computer, it might have a number that was assigned to it by the camera. So image number seven, four, nine, two, whatever, that's a piece of metadata. It'll have a size. It'll have some dimensions. It'll have a file size or type. So these are all pieces of metadata, And then it could have additional metadata. Like you might go in and tag somebody, or you might name that photo of something, and those would get added to the information.

Deblekha

Is that automatic?

Sarah

if you go in and tag something, then it'll get stored with the photo. There is software now that will automatically tag all your stuff for you, but those tags would get added to the, we say the record, but that's like the information about the thing.

Deblekha

So would you say the record. But if I tag someone in Facebook, so if that picture, would that be in my search in the computer?

Sarah

That will be in Facebook. So it could be that when you tag somebody in Facebook, Facebook is storing that metadata that you've added to the photo. And then when you're in Facebook, then it will work. Or that person will be able to find that image because their name is now on it. So they make it a notification. So metadata can kind of trigger that action of them getting a notification. But if you did it in Facebook, then it probably lives in Facebook. If you did it on your phone or on your computer, that's where it would probably live. Any kind of digital object has metadata. Video would have similar metadata. some of it would be automatic from the kinds of equipment you're using and the file, but it also could be stuff you've added later, like the title and the description.

Deblekha

Okay. Okay. This is okay. I'm starting to get a sense of the shape of it.

Okay. So we were talking about the stuff that's automatic versus the stuff that's kind of more curatorial or, or maybe person based content. So maybe can you describe the different types of metadata?

Sarah

Sure. Yeah. So there, I would say there's, there, there are two big categories that especially these days with digital stuff, one is, you know, all that automated stuff. So you might not have a lot of control over it. It's applied by the software that you're using or the tools that you're using, but it's very practical and helpful. And that tends to be just a lot of technical information about the file itself that you're working with. And then there's like you said, sort of that human generated metadata, which tends to be more descriptive, more human readable, but within that, there's metadata that does different jobs. So that's the thing with metadata. It serves a purpose. So some of it has a very administrative purpose. That would be things like, if you've got a video and you want to indicate permissions for use, and you want to put a little label on it that says, 'yes, you can reuse this.'

Sarah

It could be things like the file type or that it requires a certain piece of equipment to be used, very sort of practical stuff. You're going to have descriptive metadata, which is what we often think of with, you know, the name of the video, the description, maybe some information about the cast and the crew, or who worked on it, just some very like human readable, human interest metadata. And then you're going to have some structural stuff too, which is also quite administrative, but it's really, the structural stuff has to do with sort of the hierarchy. Where does it belong in a collection of other items? is it part of some larger thing? Is it part of a series? Is it in a hierarchical relationship with something else? So there's a lot of relationship information there. And this is again, when you have a lot of things, the relationship between them can sometimes be as important as your relationship to the individual item. You might not be looking for just that item. You might actually want to know that it's part of something larger or more complex.

Deblekha

So what's in the structural metadata I'm trying to think of following an example, like I might not know that this little video that I'm making here is perhaps part of a Zeitgeist and that maybe there's other, you know, participatory videos that are centering, you know, racialized. Is that what you mean?

Sarah

Sort of. That might also fall into descriptive. Cause you might want to put information about your video in your descriptions that allows it to be found at the same time as other things with that description. The structural stuff might be more within your organization. So if you had a project that had a number of different videos and maybe some other components to it, some event, some videos, some written materials, you might want to label all of those as belonging to part of the same set. So that kind of structure

Deblekha

The administrative and the structural and the descriptive metadata are all, really are controlled at the micro level.

Sarah

Yes.

Deblekha

But, what parts of metadata do we most need to be aware of the wider, uh classification systems?

Sarah

So it really depends. So if you're really focused on internal management of a whole bunch of things, then you're going to be really focused on those internal pieces that have to do with where it fits in your organization. And what other work you're doing that it's related to or what you're using it for. But if you're really outwardly focused and maybe you're trying to reach an audience, then that descriptive metadata is really important because that's how humans find things. You can use descriptive metadata to hook your work into the larger sort of societal stuff that's going on because when somebody's searching for a certain topic or kind of video or thing they're thinking about, they'll pull in your stuff as well as other similar stuff in their searching.